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# Beyond Positive Psychology : Philosophical Insights to Avoid the Potential Dangers of Vulgarized Appreciations of Positive Emotion

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## ポジティブ心理学を超えて

——ポジティブ感情の通俗的理解と正当化が孕む潜在的危険性を回避するための哲学的洞察——

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### Abstract :

Recent years have seen a growing awareness of how cognition and emotion are inseparably interconnected with each other. Correspondingly, there has been a rising positive psychology movement, emphasizing the importance of positive emotion. Although the appreciation of positive emotion is a desirable epistemological turn to better grasp successful development and learning, it is not without its danger, especially when understood in a superficial and vulgarized way. This paper argues that the appreciation of positive emotion has a potential of unsealing at least two pitfalls, which could work as the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence to hinder and distort the healthy and creative weaving of cognition and emotion for further self-actualization and beyond. Those enemies include at least (a) *the anti-intellectual passive hedonism* and (b) *the evolutionarily-inherited instinctive dispositions toward close(d)ness*. Their potential antidotes provided are (a') *the Reason-led active eudaimonia* and (b') *the existential intelligence toward trans-humanistic openness*, respectively. This paper is the short speculative precursors to this formidable issue of vital importance in the modern world.

**要旨：**近年、認知過程と情動過程がいかに不可分に結びついているかについての認識がますます深まっている。これに対応するように、ポジティブ心理学の運動が盛んになっており、ポジティブな感情を活用することの重要性が強調されている。ポジティブ感情を享受することは発達や学習の過程をより良く理解し導く上で重要な知見であり望ましい認識論的転換であるものの、それにはそれ自身の危険性があり、表面的で通俗的にそれを捉えることは問題であることを忘れてはいけない。本論では、ポジティブ感情の正当化が孕む少なくとも二つの落とし穴を指摘し、健全で創造的な認知と情動の相互織り成しと自己実現・自己超越の上でそれらが躓きの石となってしまうということを学際的諸知見に触れながら示す。それらの危険は少なくとも (a) 反知性主義的で受動的な快楽主義、(b) 進化的に継承された閉鎖性＝親密性への本能的傾性 の二つに集約される。それらへの解決策への糸口として、(a') 理性に導かれた能動的エウダイモニア、(b') 超・人間性実存的知性 がそれぞれ議論される。本論は、現代社会において決定的に重要であり且つ手強い問題の解決への思弁的試みである。

**Key words :** Positive Psychology, Active Eudaimonia, Existential Intelligence, Height of Emotion

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## 1. Introduction

Recent years have seen growing awareness of how cognitive processes including learning and memory are closely and inseparably interconnected with affective processes including feeling, emotion, and motivation. Correspondingly, there has been a rising positive psychology movement (cf. Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000 ; Seligman, 2011). Positive psychological visions of human nature and its optimal development, which were already applied to education (viz., positive education ; Seligman et al., 2009), have been introduced to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Applied Linguistics, foreign language teaching and learning not only as the tasks in language classes (Helgesen, 2017) but also as the general psychological framework for language learning ('EM-PATHICS' vision ; Oxford, 2016).

To provide prominent examples, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), in contrast to the tradition of foreign language classroom anxiety studies, broadened the scope to include the foreign language classroom enjoyment, emphasizing the importance of positive emotion in foreign language learning. Rahimi and Bigdeli (2014) applied the Broaden-and-Build theory of positive psychology (Fredrickson, 2001, cf. Kanazawa, 2016) to SLA and suggested that "second language teachers should go beyond a focus on the reduction of negative emotions, such as language anxiety, towards a focus on the enhancement of positive emotions within language learners" (p.799). More recently, Lake (2016) extended the L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2005) and proposed a new concept of positive L2 self, arguing that the distinction of ideal selves and ought-to selves in the original model is less important than whether the learner is authentically engaged, true to herself/himself, having interest, passion, and positive outlook to the mastery goals (p.241). Furthermore, Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir (2016) formulated a new motivational concept named the Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs), which can be interpreted as the long-term Flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In delineating the DMCs, one of its key components was identified as positive emotionality. Based on psycholinguistic experimental studies and wide interdisciplinary findings from philosophy, neuropsychiatry, paleopsychology, positive psychology, social psychology, and gerontology, Kanazawa (2018) proposed the Deep Positivity Hypothesis (DPH). According to the DPH, positive emotion facilitates higher/deeper/semantic cognition whereas negative emotion facilitates lower/shallower/perceptual cognition. Therefore, it was implied that making the most of positive emotion, not just emotion in general, is a vital perspective for teachers and learners for the sake of deeper learning.

Although it is undeniable that positive emotion is crucial not only in learning but also in well-being in general, it must at least be acknowledged and argued that the appreciation of positive emotion has a potential of unsealing the pitfalls, which could work as the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence to hinder and distort the healthy and creative weaving of cognition and emotion for further self-actualization and beyond. Those enemies include at least *the anti-intellectual passive hedonism* and *the evolutionarily-inherited instinctive dispositions toward close(d)ness*. Their potential antidotes are *the Reason-led active eudaimonia* and *the existential intelligence toward trans-humanistic openness*, respectively. The following in this section is the short speculative precursors to this formidable issue of vital importance.

## 2. Active eudaimonia

The first stone of stumbling in the appreciation of micro-level emotion is *the anti-intellectual passive hedonism*. Embracing emotion has too often been accompanied by the disdain of Reason, leading easily to anti-intellectualism (cf. Hofstadter, 1963). For example, in the field of metaethics, Ayer (1936/1971) famously proposed the ethical stance of *emotivism*, which claims that “the function of the relevant ethical word is purely ‘emotive’”. It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them” (p.111). This view is based on the perspective that “assertions of value are not scientific but ‘emotive’ . . . [not intellectual propositions and therefore they are] neither true nor false” (ibid., p.7), clearly influenced by the dichotomous trade-off view of emotion and cognition. This Cartesian dichotomous view is far from the truth. As William James notes, “we are thinking beings, and we cannot exclude the intellect from participating in any of our functions . . . Even in soliloquizing with ourselves, we construe our feelings intellectually” (James, 1901-1902/1917, p.432). Not only that, emotion *per se*, without the harness of higher Reason, “is private and dumb, and unable to give an account of itself. It allows that its results are mysteries and enigmas, declines to justify them rationally, and on occasion is willing that they should even pass for paradoxical and absurd” (ibid.), falling into a typical stance of anti-intellectualism.<sup>1)</sup>

The malady of such a seesaw view of emotion-cognition is prominent in the misoriented pursuit of momentary sensuous pleasure (e.g., You-Only-Live-Once ; YOLO mindset). According to the levels of positive emotion theory (Seligman, 2002), such pursuit of pleasant life is the lowliest hedonism, which is qualitatively different from *eudaimonia*, the positive emotions toward goodness and meaningfulness of life (cf. Aristotle, 350 BC/1893). On the quest for higher eudaimonia, lowly hedonism may not be satisfied. Sacrifice of lowly hedonism, however, might pave the way for the profound existence with higher virtue. After all, the human nature is argued to be rarely purely good for most people (cf. Xunzi, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC/1966, Chapter 23). As a prominent stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca laments, “the road to vice is not only downhill, but steep ; and many men [i.e., people] are rendered incorrigible by the fact that . . . the errors of life are a positive source of pleasure” (65/1925, XCVII, 11). Therefore, Seneca stresses the importance to stir the “seed of everything that is honourable” (ibid., XCIV, 29) to grow, restoring the virtuous conduct which actually was already ingrained in human beings innately and has always been present in souls consciously or

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1 ) The traditional view of *cool* science without emotion is anything but the quintessence of scientific investigations. Even mathematics, which is the purest, the most abstract, and the superordinate of theoretical sciences (Peirce, 1902/1931, para. 1.240), is never devoid of emotion in its essence. Henri Poincaré, one of the greatest mathematicians, eloquently describes the pivotal role of emotion in mathematical contemplation and discovery as follows : “the privileged unconscious phenomena, those susceptible of becoming conscious, are those which, directly or indirectly, affect most profoundly our emotional sensibility. It may be surprising to see emotional sensibility invoked *à propos* of mathematical demonstrations which, it would seem, can interest only the intellect. This would be to forget the feeling of mathematical beauty, of the harmony of numbers and forms, of geometric elegance. This is a true esthetic feeling that all real mathematicians know, and surely it belongs to emotional sensibility” (Poincaré, 1908/1913, p.391). However, as one of the greatest writers Leo Tolstoy warns, it deserves mindful consideration that scientific investigation without what he calls *the religious outlook* (i.e., the whole-person outlook integrating not only intellectual but also emotional sphere of human being) tends to examine secondary issues, which ends up in a cluttered mishmash of increasingly complex knowledge, instead of facing the crux of the problem that needs to be solved (Tolstoy, 1902/1927 b, p.35). An excellent example of such a *religious outlook* is “*Mastery for Service*,” the motto of Kwansei Gakuin University (Bates, 1915).

subconsciously no matter when. Such a virtuous life is not a cold inhumane state of *apatheia* but is synonymous to happy eudaimonious life, whose positive emotion is much deeper and universal than that of vicious sensual life (Epictetus, 1994). Realizing the lowliness of the self as the default state, training the spirit toward the good, overcoming the existential despair (Kierkegaard, 1849/1983) and *die Grenzsituation* (the limit situation; Jaspers, 1932/1964), through the darkest night of soul (Bergson, 1932/1935, p.197), one would have slim chances to embody the harmony of deep positive emotion and highly sophisticated intelligence. If each hedonism was cherished blindly, such a profound harmony would never be glimpsed. It is true that the cold existential dread which wards away hedonism may seem and felt negative. However, at the existential depth, as Søren Kierkegaard eloquently notes, those who learned rightly to be in dread have learned the most important thing (Kierkegaard, 1844/1944, p.139).

Emotion must be led by the Reason, not *vice versa*. “In so far only as men [and women] live in obedience to reason, do they always necessarily agree in nature” (Spinoza, 1677, Book IV, PROP. XXXV). This is also a sound existential stance from the perspective of social equality. As Leo Tolstoy emphasizes, the truth can be reached via Reason rather than via absolute miracle dissociated from Reason. Unlike mysticistic oracles of a small number of selected individuals, the Reason is equally bestowed to everyone. The Reason has never been perfect and will be so. However, it can be improved by tenacious efforts and accumulating experiences. (cf. Tolstoy, 1901/1927 a). The jury is still out as to whether YOLO is a metaphysical truth, but assuming that it was true, you would have to train your Reason to lead a virtuous life in harmony with emotion all the better for YOLO.<sup>2)</sup>

Saint Augustin d'Hippone allegedly noted, “*celui qui se perd dans sa passion a moins perdu que celui qui perd sa passion*” (translation: the one who is lost in his/her passion has lost less than the one who loses his/her passion; Kristeva, 2002, p.230). This would be the ultimate truth for a mystic vividly witnessing the on-going celestial miracle.<sup>3)</sup> However, such a mysticistic spur of virtuous emotion belongs to an esoteric kind, which is not shared equally by everyone in every time. The situation being such, if the author dare makes an addition to this famous quote, the one who is actively and dynamically finding himself/herself while harmonizing his/her Reason and the vast sea of

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2) Unleashed pursuit of hedonism unaccompanied by tenacious self-discipline can turn a life into a tragedy, hindering one from embodying the full potential of eudaimonia. An eloquent and grievously emotion-involved testimony is given by the prodigious and prodigal genius Charles Sanders Peirce in 1909, when he was allegedly leading a destitute life in his 70s: “If I had a son, I should instill into him this view of morality, (that is, that Ethics is the science of the method of bringing Self-Control to bear to gain satisfaction) and force him to see that there is but one thing that raises one individual animal above another, — Self-Mastery, and should teach him that the Will is Free only in the sense that, by employing the proper appliances, he can make himself behave in the way he really desires to behave. As to what one ought to desire, it is, I should show him, what he will desire if he sufficiently considers it, and that will be to make his life beautiful, admirable. Now the science of the Admirable is true Esthetics. Thus, the Freedom of the Will, such as it is, is a one sided affair. . . . There is no freedom to be or to do anything else. Nor is there any freedom to do right if one has neglected the proper discipline. By these teachings, by showing him that a poor dog is more to be respected than an improvident man, who has not prepared himself beforehand to withstand the day of temptation, I should expect to render him eager to submit to a pretty severe discipline” (Brent, 1998, p.49).

3) The vivid mysticistic experience and the accompanying “highest” kind of positive emotion are eloquently described by H. Bergson: “Shaken to its depths by the current which is about to sweep it forward, the soul ceases to revolve round itself and escapes for a moment from the law which demands that the species and the individual should condition one another. It stops, as though to listen to a voice calling. Then it lets itself go, straight onward. It does not directly perceive the force that moves it, but it feels an indefinable presence, or divines it through a symbolic vision. Then comes a boundless joy, an all-absorbing ecstasy or an enthralling rapture” (Bergson, 1932/1935, p.196).

surrounding passion has lost less than the one who is lost in his/her passion. Reason and emotion should not be cognized as the two opposing seats of the seesaw, but as reciprocal warp and woof of the hand-woven carpet of life. Whether the outcome is beautiful or not depends on the weaver's elaborate prospects and tenacious efforts.

### 3. Existential intelligence

The second rock of offence was *the evolutionarily-inherited instinctive dispositions toward close(d)ness*. An intriguing psychoneuroendocrinosociological example regarding this point is reported by Sapolsky (2017). According to the finding, the highly praised oxytocin, a so-called *happy hormone* which modulates human communication toward prosocial behavior and cognition (cf. de Boer et al., 2017), is not devoid of side effects. The neuropeptide is effective in making in-group affinity, connection, and favoritism, at the expense of enhancing out-group indifference and hostility (the problem of 'Us' versus 'Them' ; cf. Greene, 2014). It is no coincidence that *closedness* and *closeness* share the same adjective form, *close*. No wonder the attempted anti-war and ecological campaigns to extend the biological affection beyond couples, families, regional communities to the whole earth (e.g., *Make Love No War*) have ended up in craze, lacking vision of elaborate and sustainable social system. Emotions can not only broaden and build cognition toward openness and newness but also narrow and stagnate cognition toward closedness and exclusiveness (cf. Bergson, 1932/1935). Both dispositions accord to evolutionary demands ; the former being effective in searching for a new niche, the latter in protecting the acquired objects and for reproduction. In the case of global society, the importance of the former has been acknowledged and advocated by way of such ideas as liberty, equality, and fraternity while the revolt by the remnants of the latter instinct is emerging in such forms as nationalism, discrimination, and microaggression (Lilienfeld, 2017).

An additional thought-provoking evidence is derived in relation to emotional intelligence, which refers to "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189). Although emotional intelligence has a close connection with such desirable phenomena as moral development (Pizarro & Salovey, 2002) and resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), it may sometimes be used with the malicious intention of the dark side. Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham (1999) revealed that those with high emotional intelligence may not always utilize their power for common wealth. According to their findings, ring-leader bullies had significantly better emotional understanding and social cognition than follower bullies, victims, and defenders of the victims. This shows that high emotional intelligence does not always necessitate virtuous emotional intention and behavior, which is an important point but is often overlooked. To borrow from Hildegard von Bingen, it must not be forgotten that "the bow should always be bent for defense against the vices" (Bingen, 1141-1151/1990, Book 3, Vision 4, p.363).<sup>4)</sup>

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4) Pedagogical practice is not devoid of the problems related to virtuousness and emotion-involvement as well. A perturbing pedagogical example can be seen in *Unko kanji drill* (Poop kanji drill ; Bunkyo-sha, 2017), a recently published *kanji* learning material targeted to elementary school children in Japan. Its characteristic is that all the example sentences and contexts are made explicitly related to poops and excretion. It has been advertised in many forms of media, reporting that the drill turned out to be effective in arousing and attracting children's attention to engage in learning *kanji*. ↗

Facing cases and evidences proving that emotion-involved cognition can be narrow-minded, closed, and even vicious, something more than pure intelligence and emotional intelligence is needed. A promising candidate is *existential intelligence*. *Existential intelligence*, also known as *cosmic smart*, is the “ninth intelligence [in the revised multiple intelligence theory]. . . which [Howard] Gardner describes as the intelligence of concern with ultimate life issues such as the meaning of life, the problem of evil, and the aims of human endeavor” (Armstrong, 2009, p.2). Behind existential intelligence is the rich and profound philosophical background of existentialism (e.g., Kierkegaard, 1849/1983 ; Jaspers, 1932/1964).<sup>5)</sup> Existential emotional sensitivity is what drives people incessantly from resting in the comfortable closedness, instead directing toward trans-humanistic openness (cf. Solomon, 2007 ; Jaspers, 1935/1955). After all, no matter how close a relationship would seem for *moi superficiel*, in the depth of existence, as Søren Kierkegaard eloquently describes, each one of us is ultimately a single individual, one stands alone before God (Kierkegaard, 1849/1983 ; cf. Manheimer, 1977). The following remark by the stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus resonates with the acute existential realization : “Not to live as if you had endless years ahead of you. Death overshadows you. While you’re alive and able – be good” (161-180/2002, Book IV, Article 17). In such a realization that the unfathomable *Existenz* stalks you, there is no other way than to direct one’s emotion-involved cognition vertically into the existential depth (or height), from which the saving experiences derive (James, 1901-1902/1917, p.515).<sup>6)</sup> Existenz-involved cognition (or cognition-involved existenz) could be the last resort to whole-bodily realize the terror of being a human to genuinely appreciate the wonder of being a human (cf. Castaneda, 1972/1991).

A similar epistemological turn into the cultivation of dispositions and mental habits toward the depth of higher and virtuous emotion has also been attempted from such perspectives as spiritual well-being and gratitude (Elosúa, 2015), positive emotion interwoven with spirituality (Miller-Perrin & Krumrei Mancuso, 2015), compassion (Seppälä, 2017), and faith (Dörnyei, Wong, and Kristjánsson, 2013). After all, when there is no incessant urge into virtuousness, cognition is easily led astray, regardless of whether it is involved with emotion or not. As John Dewey (1919/1920) argues, what is needed is “a sympathetic and integral intelligence brought to bear upon the observation and understanding of concrete . . . events and forces” (p.131). Or else, the dynamic here-and-now transi-

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↘ Its alleged effectiveness may be explained from the perspective of *emotional design* (Norman, 2004) ; the drill facilitates making associative links between the target *kanji* and the “emotional” object which is related to an evolutionarily preceding animal instinct of excretion. This, however, is far from a panacea for reluctant learners. It may appear so at a first glance, but it definitely would not be so in the long run. How can there be no ethical danger in having young developing brains create micro living associations between the basic building blocks of literacy and the scatological indecency! Although ethical considerations were allegedly made in the making of the drill by excluding sentences which denote extremely negative situations such as bullying, it is still not recommended, unless the child is among the supposedly and hopefully small number of children who cannot concentrate on learning *kanji* without the aid of vulgar association of poops. In any case, it must always be noted that not all the effective emotions are those in harmonious to sound mind, high morality, and the elegance of thought.

5) Existentialism in this sense is closer to the practical perspectives of Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Jaspers than theoretical (and atheistic) perspectives of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre (cf. Hayashida, 1974).

6) In William James’ own words, “the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come” (James, 1901-1902/1917, p.515) and “the whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also ; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in” (ibid., p.519).

tions will fail to be interwoven tenaciously and constantly with higher virtuous existential ideal, resulting in intolerance, demoralization and even catastrophic World Wars (p.204). As John Hopkins Denison describes, “civilization is grounded in emotion and regulated by it, and that the difficulties of this present age result from a failure to appreciate this fact and to cultivate the emotions which are essential to the new forms which civilization has assumed” (Denison, 1928, p.233).

Finally, it is also to be reminded that the emotionality may alter its quality and function as one cultivates the existential intelligence. As Jiddu Krishnamurti notes, “to see the whole thing you need a very sharp mind, very clear mind, a mind that’s not biases, a mind that doesn’t say, ‘This I like, this I don’t like’” (Krishnamurti, 1966/2011, p.110). In this sense, valence tagging to objects (i.e., thinking whether objects are positive, neutral, or negative ; which has been shown to be beneficial in foreign language vocabulary learning ; cf. Kanazawa, 2017) may still be a “shallow” emotional maneuver, which is to be surmounted on the process of existential development toward the self-actualization in the profound sense and beyond (self-transcendence ; Maslow, 1968). Echoing with the dissociation of hedonism and eudaimonia, Maslow (1968) differentiates “the Heaven ahead (of growth and transcendence) from the ‘Heaven’ behind (of regression). The ‘high Nirvana’ is quite different from the ‘low Nirvana’” (p.154). What would deserve more mindful consideration in the future mindful contemplation is the “*height*” of emotion guided by existential intelligence, transcending the terrestrial gravity (cf. Weil, 1947).

#### 4. Envoi

The present paper attempted to pay mindful attention to the potential dangers of positive emotion, when appreciated with insufficient contemplation. As a result, two pitfalls are now brought to light and the clues to their solutions were argued. Positive emotion is fundamental and worthy, but it is critical for higher cognition to harness emotion, not *vice versa*. Among positive emotion, it is active eudaimonia that is to be pursued, not passive hedonism. Furthermore, higher cognition involved with emotion should not stay merely intelligent emotionally, but it should incessantly aim at being intelligent existentially, beyond the limitation of existing human cognition, toward utmost openness and wisdom that human beings have yet to embody on a non-esoteric, larger scale.

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